

Obituaries

Lady Jean Medawar

A family planning pioneer

Jean Medawar was the wife of Sir Peter Medawar, the distinguished UK transplant immunologist and Nobel laureate. She spent her life supporting her husband's career and working hard for causes she cared about and believed in—the global environment, population control, and family planning.

She was one of a redoubtable group of women who had to combat the most extraordinarily hostile attitudes in the early days of family planning. She was fond of quoting a letter published in the *Lancet* in 1930, when she was 17, saying that the subject “was something that no decent man would handle with a pair of tongs.”

In 1954, when she was 31, she met Margaret Pyke, chairwoman of the Family Planning Association, and this started her considerable contribution to the movement. She became a member of the executive in 1960, and was chairwoman from 1968 to 1970. For two decades, from 1957 to 1976, she was joint editor of *Family Planning* (now *Family Planning Today*). Her co-editor was Margaret Pyke's son, David Pyke, later registrar of the Royal College of Physicians.

She was also an active member of the Family Planning Association's central London branch and was on many committees of the association and allied organisations.

When Margaret Pyke died in 1966, Jean and David Pyke set up the Margaret Pyke Memorial Trust, which promoted education and research in matters of sexual health and population control. The Margaret Pyke Centre was opened by the Duke of Edinburgh in November 1969. The duke is reported once to have said, “It is difficult to refuse an invitation from Jean Medawar.”

She was beautiful, charming, magnetic, moderate, and, on committees, non-combative. She spoke fluent French and German, and some Swedish, Italian, and Russian, which greatly increased her effectiveness at international conferences.

Jean Medawar's father was a doctor in Cambridge, her mother an American from St Louis, Missouri. Jean Taylor, as she then was, was educated in Cambridge and at Benenden School, Kent, from where she won a scholarship to Somerville College, Oxford, to study zoology. Here she met Peter Medawar. He described her as “the most



beautiful woman in Oxford”; she described his looks as “mildly diabolical.” Their first exchange was during a lecture, when she asked him in a whisper what heuristic meant. He explained that it came from the Greek word *heureka*, meaning I have found it, and offered her tutorials on “mechanism, vitalism, and other quasi-philosophical aspects of biology.” He went on to give her tutorials in philosophy.

She took her BSc in 1935 and did some work on the origin and development of lymphocytes under Howard Florey, later Lord Florey, who developed penicillin.

In 1932 she spent a holiday in the Black Forest. The Nazi party was gaining strength in Germany and she saw swastika flags flying, even though they were illegal. At Oxford she and Peter joined the Labour Party, which opposed appeasement, and they did what they could to help refugee German scientists who came to Britain in the years preceding the outbreak of war.

Many years later, in 2000, with David Pyke, she published *Hitler's Gift* (review *BMJ* 2001;322:681), a book about scientists who fled Nazi Germany.

She married in the face of vigorous objections from her family. Because Peter was born in Brazil of a Lebanese father, her mother asked her what she would do if she had black babies, and an aunt disinherited

her because Peter had “no background, and no money.”

She spent the following two decades bringing up her children while her husband's career took her to Birmingham and then, in 1951, to London.

He had a major stroke in 1969, aged only 54, which left him permanently disabled but mentally unimpaired. She made sure he got the best treatment possible and he continued researching and writing.

Her husband wrote about her in his book *Memoir of a Thinking Radish* (1986), “She relieved me all our married life of the chores that might hinder the prosecution of scientific research.” After his death in 1987 she returned the compliment in another book, *A Very Decided Preference: Life with Peter Medawar* (1990).

She and Peter were great hosts, and their Hampstead home was open house to writers, artists, and intellectuals. She outlived Peter by 18 years and continued to take an active part in the Margaret Pyke trust until the mid-1990s.

She leaves two sons and two daughters. [CAROLINE RICHMOND]

Jean Shinglewood Medawar (née Taylor), former chairwoman Family Planning Association, editor Family Planning, and trustee Margaret Pyke Memorial Trust (b 1913, d 3 May 2005).

John Deryk Pollitt

Psychiatrist who made major contributions to our understanding of depression



John Pollitt was the epitome of the London teaching hospital psychiatrist. His research drew attention to the wide variety of precipitants for depressive illness and the wide range of clinical pictures of the illness, which, he maintained, were not a product of the precipitant but a product of the individual patient's basic personality.

He wrote one of the first monographs on depression (*Depression*, Heinemann, 1965), and later a *Textbook of Psychological Medicine for Students* (Churchill). He wrote several specialised chapters in general medical and psychiatric textbooks and many articles on depressive illness, anorexia nervosa,

and dementia in *The Practitioner* and *Hospital Medicine*.

John was also in demand by publishers to assess submitted textbooks and plays with psychiatric themes. He gave several short talks on BBC radio and appeared on television in *The Hurt Mind* and *Your Life in Their Hands*.

Born in Plumstead, London, in 1926, John entered St Thomas' Hospital as a medical student in 1944. His undergraduate career was soon disrupted by pulmonary tuberculosis. This and a recurrence 18 months later in pre-antibiotic days led to two years of rest and the advice to relinquish his career. He used this time to study formal logic, social psychology, physiognomy, and craniometry, which laid the foundations of a broad approach in medicine.

After early training posts, he researched obsessional states and did seminal work on the hitherto relatively uncharted area of the natural history of mental disorder. His higher professional training continued at St Thomas' Hospital and in Northampton, before he returned to St Thomas' as chief

assistant in the psychological medicine department in 1958.

In 1959 he was awarded a Rockefeller travelling fellowship to study the natural history of depression at the Massachusetts Mental Health Center, and at Harvard. While there, he formulated the concept of the "functional shift" in depression, drawing attention to the physiological effects of the illness not seen in unhappiness. His pioneering paper on this concept, "Depression and the Functional Shift," appeared in 1960.

Shortly after his return from the United States, in 1961, he was appointed to the consultant staff at St Thomas' Hospital. In 1983 he was appointed medical director of a newly built private psychiatric hospital in west Kent.

He leaves a wife, Erica; two daughters; and his grandchildren. [ALAN POOLE, HOWARD JAMES]

John Deryk Pollitt, former physician in charge department of psychological medicine, St Thomas' Hospital, London (b London 1926; q St Thomas' 1950; MD, FRCP, FRCPsych), died from a heart attack on 9 February 2005.

George Edmund Hyson



Former general practitioner Ludgershall, Wiltshire (b Kinsale 1911; q Cambridge/St Mary's Hospital, London, 1939), d 26 March 2005.

After house jobs George was a surgeon lieutenant in the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve from 1940 to 1946. His service included destroyer protection of north Atlantic convoys, evacuation of wounded from the D Day beaches, and a period in the Far East aboard HMS *Suffolk*. For 26 years he was a partner in a large rural practice in Wiltshire. Hyson Crescent in Ludgershall is named after him. He leaves a wife, Kay; two sons; and five grandchildren. [PETER SAVAGE]

Pran Kishan Kapur

General practitioner Mapperley, Nottingham, 1965-91 (b Lahore, India, 1921; q Lahore 1945; BSc), died from a liver abscess on 14 April 2005. After house jobs in Lahore he was forced by the partition of India to move south across the new border to remain within India. In



1952 he studied for the diploma in tuberculous diseases and subsequently became medical officer in charge of a sanatorium in Himachal Pradesh and then medical officer co-ordinating the BCG vaccination programme in Delhi. He decided in 1958 to come to the United Kingdom, and after working at several hospitals in northern England set up in general practice in Nottingham. He was the first general practitioner from the Asian subcontinent in Nottingham. He leaves a wife, Ved; three children; and three grandsons. [RAJ KAPUR, PUNAM RUBENSTEIN, ADITI STEPHENS]

Hans Gerhart Kohler

Consultant in perinatal pathology Leeds Maternity Hospital 1963-80 (b Spaaz, Bohemia, 1915; q Prague, 1938; FRCPPath), died from the complications of Parkinson's disease on 13 June 2004.

Hans' early life reflected the turmoil in central Europe caused by two world wars. A free thinker, he became an atheist aged 12 and a Young Communist at 15. He was politically

active while a medical student and when fascism darkened Czechoslovakia, he decided to leave. Using false papers he was on the last Kindertransport for Holland. Once in Britain he enlisted in the Czech army-in-exile, becoming a Royal Army Medical Corps captain. His parents survived Auschwitz, but his only brother died on the forced march from Auschwitz to Dachau. Hans married twice—to Anna and later, as a widower, to Hanna. He leaves three children. [ELIZABETH GRAY]

Frank Alfred Schiess

Consultant orthopaedic surgeon Macclesfield (b 1940; q Middlesex Hospital, London, 1963), died from a heart attack on 9 December 2004.

Frank Schiess was a consultant orthopaedic surgeon in Macclesfield for nearly 20 years. His particular interest lay with surgery of the spine, and his opinion was increasingly sought after in legal quarters. Frank was born in Singapore. In the face of the imminent arrival of the Japanese he and his mother escaped to Perth in Western Australia. After the war in the Pacific was over, he and his mother moved first to Switzerland and then to London. Frank did house jobs at the Middlesex and then held posts at Manchester Royal Infirmary, including a period as lecturer. Frank was an avid reader. He leaves a wife, Diana, and three children. [ROBERT NEILL]



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